

High school MUN provides the foundation of engagement in international and domestic policy for many students around the country. Unfortunately, the Model UN community has historically not been the most inclusive space. How students are treated during conferences can often shape their self confidence in future debates and discussions. The concept of “being inclusive” isn’t a one and done checklist to accomplish, but rather an ongoing process of challenging judgement every day. It’s important that high school students understand their unique position to create a space where everyone can be heard in a society that brands teenagers as “too young” to care about political and social issues. This guide will cover practices that high school delegates can implement to make sure they are promoting inclusivity.

1. Lift up smaller countries instead of only seeking partnerships with the “biggest names”

Highly competitive schools will sometimes advise their students to build blocs with G7 countries and other large-economy nations, however this places students from schools with smaller or newer programs at a disadvantage as they are usually assigned countries that are considered “less impactful” on the global stage. The negative impact of this is two-fold. First, it perpetuates the notion that large-economy countries are considered more important and the main actors in policy. This can subconsciously instill into the minds of students that smaller countries are of lesser value, which breeds toxic inequity that is later turned into reality when these same students grow up to be politically-active citizens. Secondly, when delegates run toward larger, more developed countries represented by schools with prominent MUN programs and ignore developing nations represented by lesser-known programs, it negatively impacts the self-esteem of the students playing those smaller nations. These delegates are not given an equal opportunity to share their ideas because their country is considered less powerful. When you’re in a committee be aware of how blocs form and remember to look out for the countries that others may not instantly gravitate towards because they have the ability to contribute very innovative solutions.

2. Be attentive to those who are having their voices silenced

Chances are that at any given conference there will be individuals who are being talked over, pushed out of blocs, and just generally ignored. Whether it’s deleting their clauses, not including them in group chats, or never handing them the mic during Q&A, there are many *petty* tactics MUN delegates use that tear down others. Yes, conferences are competitions, but do not let your drive to win put you in a position where you’re intentionally being unfair to fellow students, many of whom are participating truly because they enjoy the discussion of political and social policy. If you see someone in your bloc who is constantly being spoken over, take the time to reach out and ask what they have to say. Make sure clauses are decided upon by the whole bloc and not just an individual’s preference. Overall, simply look out for those who may not have the loudest voice or most commanding leadership style.

3. Ensure that students who speak English as a second language are given an equal opportunity to share ideas

Larger conferences will often have international students participating, for many of whom English is a second language. These students face a disadvantage as they must not only tackle the rigorous issues of committee debate, but also do it in a language they might not be fully fluent in or comfortable speaking. Students from U.S. schools may turn away from international delegates due to a lack of clear communication. It is extremely important that if a student struggles with English or simply has an accent others may not easily understand, that you allow them a space to put forth their perspective. International students bring a unique point of view that could be missing from your bloc's discussion. If you speak their first language, make yourself available as a resource and bring them into the group, providing help with English if they ask.

4. Choose accessible meeting points for students with physical disabilities

With the majority of Model UN conferences being held on college campuses or in hotels, students are required to walk long distances, go up and down stairs, and cram into lecture halls or ballroom spaces. This especially poses a challenge to students with physical disabilities. When you decide to meet in a certain space with your bloc, make sure it's accessible for students in wheelchairs or with other physical disabilities. Be mindful that not everyone can walk a few blocks down the street to just meet for a couple of minutes and then quickly return back. If your committee is in a lecture hall with stairs, make sure to pick a location that it is accessible to everyone or consider having the meeting space near the delegate(s) who may not be able to transport themselves as easily.

5. Be transparent in technology usage and assist those without access to laptops/flash drives/etc.

Not all schools have the ability to provide technology for students to take with them to conferences, so for students who aren't able to afford their own laptops or tablets, technology conferences pose a barrier to them fully being immersed in the MUN experience. If you find yourself at a technology conference and have a delegate in your bloc without a laptop, ask if they have any specific clauses they would like to add and make sure if they are supposed to be on the sponsors list, that their name stays there. Consider having all clause drafts be on paper and typing the final working paper or resolution once clauses have been decided upon.

6. Don't turn a blind eye to discrimination between delegates

This is probably the most straightforward practice, yet it needs constant reminder. If you see discrimination from one delegate to another, make sure to call it out. Bring it to the person's attention that what they are doing is wrong and talk to the person they've harmed to make sure they are ok. If discrimination escalates in any way, do not be afraid to inform the committee

chair. Many people avoid reporting negative behavior for fear of retribution, but it's never permissible to allow such inequitable behavior to continue especially if you are able to stop it.

7. Work with delegates that are new to MUN or attend a school with a new/developing program

Even if your school has an amazing program, chances are you felt lost during your first conference. For those who have never attended a MUN conference before, the whole experience can be extremely overwhelming. Take into account how a student must feel if they come from a school with a program that does not share the same resources as yours. Reach out to those who look confused in committee or seem like they want to participate but aren't sure how.

8. Make connections last outside of committee

High school Model UN should not be an activity full of backstabbing and power grabs. Bloc formations and unmoderated discussions can often feel very transactional but keep in mind that the competition is over in one weekend, but you'll keep those connections for much longer. It might sound cliché but it's true. These connections can turn into friendships with people across the country so continue to talk to delegates even when you're not negotiating in committee.

9. Consider how you choose partners from your team for conferences

While it may be tempting to always partner with your best friend or the "best" person on your team, be sure to take the chance on someone who may be new or may not have the most awards. At the end of the day Model UN is an activity based on discourse from diverse sources and you won't see different perspectives if you never try partnering with anyone new.

10. Relay information on inclusivity to your own team

You can make an impact on an individual level but you can also compound that impact by educating your team on the importance of inclusivity and sharing practices on how to be more inclusive within your own team and at conferences.

When you step into that committee room, the issues you're tackling aren't just what was written in the background guide. You're facing preconceived notions, inherent biases, and real-world inequity. Doing your part to make MUN more inclusive doesn't have to be difficult. With every conscious point you make, you're moving to fill in the gaps on the circuit.

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